



MEDICAL LEGACY OF GANDHI

Demystifying Human Diseases

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‘Anyone who observes the rules of health will not need to knock the doors of doctors from day to day.’

– M.K. Gandhi

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Mahatma Gandhi’s contribution to the non-violent civil disobedience movement and India’s freedom struggle is widely known and recognized internationally. He is looked upon as one of the greatest visionaries this world has produced. Through his work, he impacted the lives of people not just in India, but around the world as well.

Describing Gandhiji’s legacy, Albert Einstein wrote:

A leader of his people, unsupported by any outward authority; a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor mastery of technical devices, but simply on the convincing power of his personality; a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force; a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times risen superior. Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.

Though Gandhiji’s role and contributions to the political arena are well known, what is less known is his contributions towards health. Not many people are aware that he was interested in studying medicine and wanted to become a medical practitioner. There were two pivotal moments in his life: in 1888 and in 1908–09, when Gandhiji wanted to earn a medical degree and become a doctor.

In 1888, when he was 18 years old, young Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi wanted to go to England to study medicine. His father, who had been a diwan or a high-ranking government official had just passed away two years ago. It was Gandhiji’s elder brother who dissuaded him from pursuing medicine because he said their father would have disapproved of the decision; since the Gandhis were Vaishnavas, they would have nothing to do with dead bodies. His brother suggested instead, it would be wiser to study law and become a barrister, which is what Gandhiji did.

Later though, even as he practised law, Mahatma Gandhi continued thinking about visiting London to



Mahatma Gandhi recuperating at the house of Rev. J.J. Doke, his first biographer, in Smith Street, Durban, after being assaulted by the Pathan Mir Alam on February 10, 1908. The photograph was taken on February 18, 1908.

study medicine. However, in 1909, he wrote to a friend saying he had heard from certain doctors that they had killed about fifty frogs while studying medicine. He said, if so, he had no desire to do the same, because he neither wanted to kill nor dissect frogs.

Gandhiji didn't end up pursuing medicine but that didn't diminish his interest in health and working for the sick and the poor. His interest in health, hygiene, nutrition and diseases was as great as his interest in politics. He insisted that adopting preventive measures for diseases was better than treatment. He also said that it was important to focus on cleanliness, a controlled diet and an exercise regimen, and that it was best to avoid over consumption of medicines, especially those that were not required.

Throughout his life, Gandhiji nursed the ailing and there is plenty of evidence to show that he wanted to be a doctor more than he wanted to be a lawyer. He practised law for about twenty years and then quit but for as long as he lived, he continued working to heal the sick. He was also a firm believer of naturopathy and conducted experiments related to diet and fasting. He always believed that it was important to understand what caused diseases and then remove that very cause, rather than falling ill and then attempting to treat it with excessive medication.

Sushila Nayyar, a doctor and a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, had written, if the aim of science

was to find the truth about things, then Gandhiji, being a seeker of truth was essentially a man of science. He approached problems in a scientific manner. Since he embraced Ahimsa (non-violence) and was an implacable opponent of vivisection, he was often critical of the allopathic system of medicine, though not against it. While he was in South Africa, he used to visit a doctor's dispensary every day despite his busy legal practice and dispensed medicines, dressed wounds and rendered whatever other help he could. Later, he even organized an Ambulance Corps during the Boer War.

GANDHIJI'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BOER WAR AND THE ZULU REBELLION

Boer is a Dutch word that means 'farmers'. The word was used for the descendants of Dutch-speaking settlers in the Eastern Cape Frontier in Southern Africa during the 18th century. The Boer War was fought between the British and the Boers. The British decided to mine gold and diamond in the land of the Boers, who were so offended by this decision that they declared war against the British. Indians in South Africa including Gandhiji supported the British during the war, even though they sympathized with the Boers. Gandhiji organized an Ambulance Corps comprising of 1,100 volunteers including 300 Indians. They were used as stretcher bearers. The Indian Ambulance Corps set up by Gandhiji provided commendable service during the Boer War.

In the Zulu Rebellion also, Gandhiji helped the government by organizing another Indian Ambulance Corps. They had to walk 64 kilometres every day to nurse the injured Zulus. Many Indian leaders were awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal for their selfless service in the Boer War. Later, after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Gandhiji was so horrified and disappointed that he returned the medals, which he had been given by the British during the Boer War and Zulu Rebellion.

HEALTH ADVICE/BETTER HEALTH PRACTICES

Gandhiji was a firm believer in the principle that a healthy mind keeps the body healthy, and he stressed on the importance of a healthy lifestyle and positive

thinking. He suffered from high blood pressure and said that he had not been able to gain control over his mind as he should have. He thought disease was an outcome of sin, so if one has sinned, one should be prepared to pay the price for it. He said if a man has overeaten and suffers from indigestion as a consequence, he should fast instead of resorting to drugs. The fast will cure the indigestion and at the same time teach him a lesson not to overeat in future.

When one of his friends from South Africa contracted malignant malaria at Sevagram, Gandhiji persuaded him to take quinine, which took the South African by surprise, because like Gandhiji, he too avoided drugs. When Gandhiji contracted malaria, he didn't want to take quinine. He tried, instead, to treat himself by fasting for three days but the fever persisted. He was advised that considering his age and failing health, it was necessary for him to take the medicines. He finally gave in, and after only two doses of quinine, he was cured. Since Mahatma Gandhi had always avoided drugs, his system was quick to react to the small doses of quinine.

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

Although Gandhiji was never against allopaths, *vaidyas* and *hakims*, his preference lay with naturopathic medicines. He often said that naturopathy was his hobby. He argued that if disease was a result of breaking nature's law, nature would be able to rectify it. He practised naturopathy for more than fifty years. In fact, what he practised might be termed as medicine for the masses. He made use of ordinary home remedies, hydrotherapy, earth treatment, fasting and dietetics to the extent that they could be tried at home. At the same time, he was also aware of its limitations and never indulged in practices that could be harmful. Gandhiji believed that an ideal nature cure institute would be a model village that was self-sufficient with a simple but effective sanitation system, where the poorest of the poor could go. He wanted such an institute to highlight the importance of preventive treatment, where patients who visited would return to their homes and advise friends, family and neighbours about the importance of healthcare and prevention of diseases.



Mahatma Gandhi (middle row, centre) with the Indian Ambulance Corps during the Boer War in South Africa, 1899-1900.
 Standing: H. Kitchen, L. Panday, R. Panday, J. Royeppen, R.K. Khan, L. Gabriel, M.K. Kotharee, E. Peters, D. Vinden, V. Madanjit.
 Middle Row: W. Jonathan, V. Lawrence, M.H. Nazar, Dr. L.P. Booth, Mahatma Gandhi, P.K. Naidoo, M. Royeppen. Front Row:
 S. Shadrach, "Professor" Dhundee, S.D. Moddley, A. David, A.A. Gandhi.



An Indian volunteer ambulance corps of stretcher bearers during the Bambata Rebellion (Zulu Rebellion) in South Africa, 1906. Top row (left to right): Coopposamy, Kunji, Ajodhasingh, Alwar, Moothoosamy, Appalsamy, Sheikh Dada Mia, Kistama, Mahomed Essop. Middle row: Jamuladin, Prabhu Hari (Cpl.), U.M. Shelat (Sergt.), Mahatma Gandhi (Sargent Major), H.I. Joshi (Sergt.), S.B. Mehd (Sergt.), Khan Mahomed. Bottom row: Sheikh Madar, Mahomed, Bomaya, Pooti Naiken.

In 1929, Gandhiji's 16-year-old grandson Rasik died of malaria. He was being treated by an allopathic doctor. Gandhiji wrote, "It appears to me that best remedies are based on nature cure methods. It seems to me that Rasik could perhaps have been saved if simple remedies had been applied."

However, Gandhiji did not express any regret at having sent Rasik to Delhi or the treatment his grandson received from the doctors.

REACHING OUT TO THE MASSES/ SERVICE TO MANKIND/PLAGUE DILEMMA

During an outbreak of pneumonic plague (black plague) while he was in South Africa at Johannesburg, Gandhiji's colleague Sjt Madanjit was so shaken to see the effect the disease was having on people that he sent a note to Gandhiji requesting him to come immediately to help. Gandhiji cycled to the location and also wrote to the town clerk, asking him to give him details of the circumstances. With the help of

three colleagues, Gandhiji put all the patients in a vacant house and took on the role of both doctor and nurse. Even though they did not have the means needed to manage a situation of this magnitude, they did all that they could to help. The town clerk was deeply grateful for this. The Council, on their part, provided a vacant godown for the patients; however, this building was unkempt and filthy. Gandhiji and his colleagues not only cleaned up the building, they also raised money to buy a few beds and other necessary things by reaching out to charitable Indians. Soon, an improvised temporary hospital was set up. The local authorities sent a nurse, who arrived with brandy and other hospital equipment. Instructions were given to provide frequent doses of brandy to the patients. Gandhi had no faith in the beneficial effects of brandy and, with the permission of Dr. Godfrey, who was the doctor in charge, he put three patients who were prepared to forego brandy under the earth treatment, which required applying wet earth bandages on their heads and chests. Two

of these patients survived. The other twenty died in the godown. Gandhiji said it was impossible to ascertain how the two patients who had agreed to the earth treatment were saved, but this incident enhanced his faith in the earth treatment as well as strengthened his skepticism for the efficacy of brandy as a medicine. Gandhiji recalled what a terrible night it had been, where they had to keep vigil and nurse the patients. He said he had nursed several patients before, but this was the first time he had been with patients who had pneumonic plague.

During the outbreak, Gandhiji and his co-workers reduced the patients' diet. He was of the belief that during epidemics it was important to eat light. Gandhiji too stopped eating at night. As he told the proprietor of the restaurant where he would eat, as he was nursing plague patients, he wanted to avoid contact with friends and acquaintances at the restaurant as much as possible.

Nursing patients

In an article 'Medicine for the Masses', Sushila Nayyar wrote that Gandhiji was so gentle with patients that she once told him, "Bapuji, you should have been a doctor." Gandhiji had replied, "I always wanted to be one."

Even though Gandhiji chose law as his profession, which took up a significant amount of time of his entire life, his passion lay in caring for the sick and nursing them back to health.

Sevagram was originally meant to be a place where Gandhiji lived on his own; he didn't want anyone to accompany him there. But that wasn't to be. Workers from distant corners began to visit and



Mahatma Gandhi as organizer of the Indian Ambulance Corps during the first World War, 1914.

Gandhiji couldn't say no. He had never planned on having a dispensary on the premises. Whenever people came to visit and asked to be treated, he would usually tell them to practise fasting. Castor oil, sodium bicarbonate, quinine and iodine were the only drugs he prescribed. However, the number of people visiting Sevagram started to increase, even more so when Dr. Sushila Nayyar, a medical practitioner joined the dispensary there. Gradually, the small dispensary took on the shape of a hospital.

There are examples of several instances where Gandhiji treated people with conditions such as rheumatism and arthritis by suggesting them a proper diet, nursing them, and telling them to adopt simple nature cure practices. Some of the patients Gandhiji treated in 1912 were Raojibhai Manibahi Patel at the Phoenix Ashram for rheumatism and Dattoba for arthritis. Gandhiji would personally take care of the patients by nursing them and keeping a watchful eye on their diet.

**Call those people Vaishnavas (great soul), who, feel the pain of others,
Help those who are in misery, But never let self-conceit enter their mind.**

*vaiṣṇava jana to tene kahiye, je pīḍa parāyī jāṇe re,
para duḥkhe upakāra kare to ye, mana abhimāna na āṇe re*

FAVOURITE BHAJAN OF GANDHIJI WRITTEN BY NARSINH MEHTA IN 15TH CENTURY

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Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Sushila Nayyar treating Pyarelal Nayyar's hurting back after being bitten by a scorpion, at Sevagram Ashram, Wardha, 1938.

HEALING SCORPION BITES

Gandhiji's ability to treat people who had been stung by scorpions was narrated by a person who witnessed an incident during one of his prison terms in South Africa. An illiterate native attendant was stung by a scorpion and came crying to Bapu. Without wasting any time, Gandhiji washed the man's hand with water, dried it and then sucked out the poison. Much of the poison was drawn out and the prison attendant began to feel better, having got rid of the pain.

HOLISTIC HEALTH

Gandhiji was a firm believer in the principle that a healthy mind keeps the body healthy. He would often say that the reason he had high blood pressure was because he couldn't control his mind as well as he would have liked to. He said that if a man suffers from indigestion as a result of overeating, he should resort to fasting instead of resorting to carminative mixtures, as not only would fasting relieve him, but would also serve as a reminder for him not to overeat in the future.

Even while consuming medicines, Gandhiji thought of the masses. Commercialization of medicine

often bothered him because he believed providing healthcare should rise above profits. He decided he would not use any patented medicine, and would instead confine himself to herbal medicines as far as possible, because they were available to the poorest of the poor.

Gandhiji once said, "Sometimes I think that quacks are better than highly qualified doctors. Let us consider: the business of a doctor is to take care of the body, or, properly speaking, not even that. Their business is really to rid the body of diseases that may afflict it. How do these diseases arise? Surely by our negligence or indulgence. I overeat, I have indigestion, I go to a doctor, he gives me medicine. I am cured, I overeat again, and I take his pills again. Had I not taken the pills in the first instance, I would have suffered the punishment deserved by me, and I would not have overeaten again. The doctor intervened and helped me to indulge myself. My body thereby certainly felt more at ease, but my mind became weakened. A continuance of a course of a medicine must, therefore, result in loss of control over the mind. I have indulged in vice, I contract a disease, a doctor cures me, the odds are that I shall repeat the vice. Had the doctor not intervened, nature would have done its work, and I would have acquired mastery over myself."

He believed the goal of medicine should not be about profits, but to alleviate pain and suffering.

Gandhiji was not partial towards any particular system of medicine. He felt it was imperative that there be one system of medicine that could cure all diseases and ailments. While he never stated how much allopathy, naturopathy, ayurveda or unani would contribute to such a medical system, he always believed in the power of preventive care and treatment that was humane in its approach and would be accessible to everyone, rich and poor.

WORKING IN THE VILLAGES

While travelling to Shantiniketan, Gandhiji found that the villages there were dirty, the lanes full of filth, the wells surrounded by dirt and the courtyards untidy. The people there, he felt, badly needed to learn about cleanliness. Gandhiji also found that several residents were suffering from various skin diseases. So he took it upon himself to clean up the villages as much as possible. He requested the Servants of India Society

to lend the services of Dr. Dev. Wherever possible, he placed each school under the charge of one man and one woman. These volunteers were responsible for medical relief and sanitation. The women volunteers worked closely with the women in the villages.

The medical relief that was offered to the people was a very simple affair. Only castor oil, quinine and sulphur ointment were provided to the volunteers. If the patient showed a furred tongue or complained of constipation, castor oil was administered; in case of fever, quinine was given after a dose of castor oil, and sulphur ointment was applied in case of boils and itches, but only after thoroughly washing the affected parts. No patient was permitted to take home any medicine. If anyone had any questions or if there were complications, Dr. Dev was consulted. This simple treatment regimen worked also because the people didn't have any complicated ailments, so they responded to the treatment that was being offered by Dr. Dev and his team.

However, managing sanitation was not so simple. The people were not prepared to do anything themselves. But Dr. Dev was not a man who easily gave up. Along with the volunteers, he swept the roads and the courtyards, cleaned out the wells, filled up the pools and managed to enlist volunteers among the villagers to help them. Gandhiji followed a similar model in Champaran as well.

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Gandhiji famously stated that the soul of India lies in our villages, both in monetary and in logistical terms

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DEALING WITH KASTURBA'S HEALTH

Thrice during his lifetime, Gandhiji saw his wife, Kasturba, fall seriously ill. Each time she was cured through household remedies. The first time this happened, the Satyagraha movement was about to commence. During this time, Kasturba Gandhi was frequently hemorrhaging. A doctor suggested surgery, to which she agreed. But the surgery had to be conducted without administering chloroform, so even though the procedure was successful, she was in tremendous pain. This happened in Durban while Gandhiji was leaving for Johannesburg. However, he

was told there was no reason for worry. But in a few days, he received a letter informing him that his wife wasn't doing well and was too weak to even sit up in bed; on one occasion she had even fallen unconscious. The doctor telephoned Gandhiji and asked him whether he could give Kasturba beef tea. Gandhiji said no and immediately took a train and reached Durban. Upon arrival, he was told his wife had already been served beef tea, as the doctor thought this was best for her health.

This upset Gandhiji and with Kasturba and their son's permission, he decided to take his wife away. Gandhiji knew he was taking a huge risk. He sent a messenger to Phoenix in advance with instructions. When they arrived, there was a hammock, a bottle of hot milk, hot water and six men to carry Kasturba. Gandhiji himself carried her in his arms and put her inside the compartment. She was very weak and undernourished, but she slowly picked up strength following hydropathic treatment.

ON HEALTH, HYGIENE AND SANITATION

Gandhiji told people to always avoid blowing their nose or spitting in public spaces.

While in South Africa, Gandhiji established the Phoenix Settlement near Durban. It was Gandhiji's first experimental ashram. Here, he ran a press for Indians to express their opinions and published *Indian*



Mahatma Gandhi visiting a missionary hospital in Madras, September 9, 1927.



Mahatma Gandhi at Birla House, during his fast for communal peace in India, New Delhi, January 17, 1947.
Centre: Dr. Sushila Nayyar.

Opinion, a weekly journal that featured informative articles on various topics like politics, diet, health and important sanitary habits.

Tolstoy Farm was another community started by Gandhiji near Johannesburg. Here too, Gandhiji made sure proper hygiene was followed.

In India, Gandhiji published two journals, *Young India* and *Navjivan*, to talk about his views and educate the public on various issues. He began publishing another weekly newspaper called *Harijan* in 1933 in English.

ON FASTING

He said, 'With apologies to medical friends, but out of the fullness of my own experiences and that of fellow cranks, I say without hesitation, fast (1) if you are constipated (2) if you are anemic (3) if you are feverish (4) if you have indigestion (5) if you have headache (6) if you are rheumatic (7) if you are gouty (8) if you

are fretting and fuming (9) if you are depressed or (10) if you are overjoyed and you will avoid medical prescription and patented medicines.'

SIMPLE SOLUTIONS TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS

In 1944, he wrote to a colleague who was dealing with an epidemic in a village, 'You will soon get lots of drugs, but they will not be very helpful. Revive people's knowledge in nature cure remedies. Local medicinal drugs should be made available. Give rice water; if you mix jaggery with it, it will provide more energy. Teach people the rules of hygiene. If food is stopped to people suffering from fever or diarrhea and they are put on boiled water, more than fifty per cent of the cases will recover.' He told his friend, while he may receive suggestions from others, he had suggested the simplest remedies.

NATURE CURE CENTRE

Gandhiji wrote to a friend who was thinking of setting up a nature cure clinic. He said the halls for treatment and experiment should be surrounded by huts that could serve as residences for patients and children who were being treated there. He also said the sanatorium should grow fruits, flowers, food grains and vegetables, that it should have cattle sheds and roads good enough for vehicles. He also suggested having a gymnasium, a tank for bathing and other facilities. Gandhiji said it was best to avoid procedures that required electricity, such as hot and cold water and steam regimens. In 1946, he spent nine days in a village to set up a nature cure centre.

GANDHI'S FAITH IN RAMNAMA

Gandhiji was an ardent believer of God and had tremendous faith in Ramnama or the chanting of Lord Ram's name. He believed it helped ease difficulty and pain, be it physical, mental or spiritual. When he was a child, Gandhiji had seen his father hear and read the Ramayana when he was ill, which influenced him greatly. The reader was great devotee of Rama, Ladha Maharaj of Bileshwar, who had cured himself of Leprosy by applying bilva leaves on affected body parts and regular recitation of Ramanama.

Gandhiji believed in using simple, inexpensive methods to treat different diseases. These included

massages, baths, fasting, earth bandages and being in an environment of clean, fresh air. He also advised people to control their diet by giving up spices and condiments as much as possible. What was important, he would say was to be able to control the mind so we eat only as much as the body needs, and not to satisfy our taste buds. Just as we breathe in air for life and drink water to quench our thirst, food should only be had to satisfy hunger. Gandhiji believed, such practices brought us closer to God and conformed to the laws of nature and served us better than consuming innumerable drugs which had harmful effects on our body. He said, just curing an ailment is never enough, the body and soul need to be treated as well. For this, nothing was more effective than Ramnama. He believed that if man put himself in God's hands, and lived a life focusing on personal hygiene and controlling one's palate and passions, he would be free from disease. At the Nature Cure Clinic that Gandhiji established at Uruli Kanchan near Pune, besides practising Nature Cure, patients were also taught the importance of Ramnama.



Mahatma Gandhi during the appendicitis operation of his grand daughter Manu at Patna, May 15, 1947.

Gandhiji's Faith in Supreme Power, the Almighty

My Rama, the Rama of our prayers, is not the historical Rama, the son of Dasharatha — the King of Ayodhya. He is the eternal, the unborn, the one without a second. Him alone I worship, His aid alone I seek, and so should you. He belongs equally to all. I, therefore, see no reason why a Mussulman or anybody should object to taking his name. But he is in no way bound to recognize God as Rama. He may utter to himself Allah or Khuda so as not to mar the harmony of the sound.

– *Harijan*, 28-4-1946

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You may say you do not believe in Him. You do not know that but for His will you could not draw a single breath. Call Him Ishwara, Allah, God, Ahura Mazda. His names are as innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my Rama. He alone is my Lord and Master.

– *Harijan*, 24-11-1946

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We want healers of souls rather than of bodies. The multiplicity of hospitals and medical men is no sign of civilization. The less we and others pamper our body the better for us and the world.

– *Young India*, 29-9-1927

Gandhiji's Thoughts for Holistic Health

Breathing

To get fresh air, one must sleep in the open. But it is no good sleeping in open only to breathe dust and dirt-laden air. The place where you sleep must be free from both. Some people cover their faces as a protection against dust and coal. It is a remedy worse than the disease. Then, there is the evil habit of breathing through the mouth. Mouth is the organ of ingestion. It is not the organ of breathing. The air passing through the nasal passages is filtered and purified and at the same time warmed up before it enters the lungs. Anyone who fouls the air by spitting about carelessly, throwing refuse and rubbish or otherwise dirtying the ground, sins against man and Nature. Man's body is the temple of God. Anyone who fouls the air that is to enter that temple desecrates it. He takes the name of Rama in vain.

– Harijan, 7-1-1946

Most Effective Remedy

Addressing the prayer meeting at Uruli Kanchan, Gandhiji said that Ramadhun was the most effective remedy for physical and mental ailments, and that no doctor or *vaidya* could promise cure by medicine. "But," he added, "God will certainly relieve you of your pains and worries if you pray to Him." But for the prayer to be effective, one must participate in Ramadhun whole-heartedly and then only one would feel peace and happiness. There were other conditions also which one has to fulfill. One must take proper food, have sufficient sleep and not give vent to one's anger. Above all, one must live in harmony with Nature and follow its principles.

– Poona, 22-3-1946

NATURE CURE AND MODERN TREATMENT

Gandhi believed his nature cure was designed solely for villagers and villages. Therefore, there is no place in it for the microscope, X-rays and similar things. Nor is there room in nature cure for medicines such as quinine, emetine and penicillin. Personal hygiene and healthy living are of primary importance. And these should suffice. If everyone could achieve perfection in this art, there could be no disease. And, while obeying all the laws of Nature in order to cure illness, if it does come, the sovereign remedy ever lies in Ramanama. But this cure through Ramanama cannot become universal in the twinkling of an eye. To carry conviction to the patient, the physician has to be a living embodiment of the power of Ramanama. Meantime, all that can possibly be had from the five agencies of Nature must be taken and used. They are earth, water, ether, fire and wind. This, to my mind, is the limit of nature cure. Therefore, my experiment in Uruli Kanchan consists in teaching the villagers how to live clean and healthy lives, and in trying to cure the sick through the proper use of the five agencies. If necessary, curative herbs that grow locally may be used. Wholesome and balanced diet is, of course, an indispensable part of nature cure.

– Harijan, 11-8-1946



Dr. Gajjar (2nd right) explains to Mahatma Gandhi the hookworm ova at "Palm Bun", Juhu Beach, May 1944. Left: Dr. Dinshaw Mehta; 2nd left: Dr. Sushila Nayyar; 3rd right: Mirabeen.

LETTER TO GOKHALE (DECEMBER 4, 1912)

"One word from the quack physician (Gandhiji): Ample fasting, strict adherence to two meals, entire absence of condiments of all kind from your food, omission of pulses, tea, coffee, etc regular taking of Kuhne baths, regular brisk walking in the country, ample allowance of olive oil and acid fruit and gradual elimination of cooked food – and you will get rid of your diabetes and add a few more years than you think to your life of service in your present body."

M.K. Gandhi, CWMG, Vol XI, p. 352

When God Tested Gandhi (Special care for a Leprosy Patient in Sevagram Ashram)

In his book, 'Incidents of Gandhiji's Life', Jairamdas Doulatram writes, in December 1939 when he was staying in Sevagram as a patient under Gandhiji's care, he had accompanied the Mahatma on his usual evening walk with 6 other people. As Gandhiji stepped out of the Ashram, a visitor greeted him and gave him a bundle of cloth. Gandhiji told the visitor that he shouldn't have come unannounced and should have instead waited to hear back from him. The visitor was none other than the renowned Sanskrit Scholar, Parchure Shastri, who had been Gandhiji's companion at the Yerwada Jail.

Parchure Shastri was suffering from severe form of leprosy and had been going from hospital to hospital, till he finally found refuge in Hardwar. Shastri said, the cloth bundle he was carrying contained the yarn he had spun himself at Hardwar, to gift Gandhiji personally one day. He said, he only wished to be able to spend one night there under a tree at the Ashram and return to Hardwar thereafter. Gandhiji asked Kanu Gandhi to provide food to Parchure Shastri and continued with his walk. However, unlike other occasions, Gandhiji was not at ease and he felt conflicted. His body rested, mind rested but his soul was in revolt with him. The battle within continued and at last great soul won the struggle. He woke up at 2 am knowing he had to listen to what his heart was trying to tell him.

After the morning prayers that day, he addressed the inmates of the Ashram and told them, God had sent Parchure Shastri to test his sincerity. After discussing the matter with the Ashram inmates, Gandhiji ensured a neat cottage was set up close to his own. The roof of the cottage was made of a plain sheet of white khadi to allow the sun to enter the cottage and heal the body. Gandhiji looked after Parchure Shastri and even massaged his wounds with his own hands. After some time, the patient started improving and getting better. While Shastri stayed at Sevagram, Gandhiji used his help to teach the inmates Sanskrit. Parchure Shastri even solemnized marriages at the Ashram while he was living under Gandhiji's care.



Above: Mahatma Gandhi visiting leper patient Parchure Shastri in his hut at Sevagram Ashram, Wardha, 1940.

Below: Parchure Shastri's Cottage.

**SEVAGRAM IS REMEMBERED AS THE LABORATORY, WHERE GANDHI
CONDUCTED MOST OF HIS SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS**

GANDHIJI'S EXPERIMENTS AT NISARGOPCHAR ASHRAM (NATURE CURE CENTRE) AT URULI KANCHAN

It is the most ancient nature cure centre of India that was started by Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1946. It was established in a remote place called Uruli Kanchan, 30 kms away from Pune city, with an idea to serve and treat the poor people through simple ways of nature cure. He thought cities like Pune have all medical facilities but villages do not have access to them. He wanted villages like Uruli to serve as an example. Gandhiji came to Uruli Kanchan on March 22, 1946 and stayed till March 30, 1946. He treated hundreds of patients with the help of Dr. Mehta, Balkobaji Bhawe, Manibhai Desai, Dr. Sushila Nayyar and other disciples.

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Gandhiji was also against cruelty towards animals. He considered it an inhuman practice and once said, I would not send a single monkey abroad for vivisection. This was the only reason he did not pursue medical science as it involved dissection. He once said, "The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

CHOLERA OUTBREAK IN SEVAGRAM

When there was an outbreak of cholera in Sevagram in 1938, Dr. Sushila Nayyar proposed preventive inoculation for everyone. Kasturba Gandhi and other inmates of the ashram refused, despite Gandhiji warning them that they might have to be quarantined. Dr. Nayyar managed to get most people in the nearby village inoculated and later recalled that due to a vigorous anti-cholera drive, the village was soon free from cholera and the ashram remained safe.



Snake cage at Sevagram Ashram, Wardha.

Mahatma Gandhi will be remembered for his many contributions – his role in India's freedom struggle, his fight for human rights and his work for the downtrodden people, just to name a few. Despite limited medical facilities and treatments available during that time, Gandhiji's approach towards disease management by adopting simple, eco-friendly and cost-effective methods benefited several people. He lived in an era of global turmoil and upheavals and faced two World Wars, but his philosophy towards life was simple. His charismatic personality won him respect and honour

throughout the globe. He lived a very simple life and he conducted his experiments first on himself before he suggested others to follow. His legacy in today's fast moving world is equally relevant. His teaching and practices may prove to be a guiding force for generations to come. It would indeed be a great tribute to this monumental man if we carry forward his legacy and adopt his teachings in our day to day life during his 150th birth anniversary year.

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Mahatma Gandhi on his walk from Seggaon to Wardha, October 1933.